



INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION ON GROWTH OF STUDENTS' POPULATION IN SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate the influence of strategic communication on the growth of students' population in selected private universities in Kenya. The study was guided by Resource-based theory. The study utilized descriptive research design. Random sampling technique was used to select research respondents. The study targeted private universities in North Rift, South Rift and Nyanza region of Kenya. The unit of observations was staff and students in various departments and faculties existing in the institutions. The study used purposive sampling to select research respondents. Questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection. Descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of SPSS version 23.0 were used to analyze collected data and presented using frequency distribution tables and bar graphs. The findings indicated that if strategic communication is changed by one unit, the growth of student population will increase by a margin of 0.440. The study concludes that strategic communication plays a critical role in growing students' population in private universities. It is also recommended that private universities should consider using professional bloggers to build the publicity of the institution. Top management of the private universities will get insight on various strategic issues with regard to student population through the recommendations of the study. Scholars in the field of strategic management will find the study useful as it will form basis of future references.

Keywords: Strategic communication, growth of student population, private universities

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a vital role of building the human resources capacity required to support the economic development and growth of countries. According to Marjanova and Fotov (2014), the higher education sector, however, has been experiencing fierce competitiveness in the context of globalization of education. The competitive arena has brought in new frameworks, which build upon strategic management or integration of the vision, mission, and objectives as important determinants of the direction the institution is taking. The vision, mission, and objectives are components of strategic intent, which is considered crucial for the achievement of higher performance, direction, and consistency in the allocation of institutional resources (Marjanova & Fotov, 2014).

The enrolment rate in university education in Sub-Saharan Africa is very slow (UNESCO, 2004). The demand and supply of the same education is of great significance in provision of the required highly skilled manpower. The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for university education for example, South Africa is 15%, Egypt is 30% and Mauritius 15.3% is highest of the top countries (Otieno, 2005). In Poland, as in many other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, the rapid reforms and the global transformations in higher education have intensified the discussion about private higher education. The rapid rise of new private institutions soon invited questions about quality and legitimacy. And despite the fact that, unlike the existing public institutions, these new private colleges and universities are untainted by the communist past and are part of the broader transformation process from a planned state economy to a market oriented one, they still continue to grapple with social acceptability (Levy, 2005).

A mass private higher education sector in Brazil, Japan and Romania has emerged in response to an increase in demand for higher education and the inability of public higher education to accommodate this demand. Levy suggests that in this category the private providers are usually very specialized, vocationally oriented and usually non-elite institutions. The public institutions that co-exist with these privates will often be restricted in size and often selective in their admission policies (Reisz, 2015).

Strategic planning process involves analyzing the organization's internal and external environment followed by careful and logical planning of the execution process and making useful choices. To achieve their performance targets, institutions such as universities ought to build synergy between strategy planning and execution for effective integration of their plans towards advancing the missions of their institutions. One of the most important strategies is strategic intent, which refers to the relentless pursuit to realize an aspiring strategic objective

and anticipated business situation through cautiously intertwining and harmonizing of the organization's vision, mission and strategic objectives (Bowlby, 2011).

In order for institutions such as universities to be successful in the exploitation of their resources and at the same time drive their competitive advantage, they need to employ a holistic approach towards the formulation and execution of their strategic intent, which affect performance. Ordinarily, the core of providing direction, or strategic intent, lies with the organizational executives and the chief executive officers (CEOs) of universities (which are typical institutions) are so apprehensive about strategy execution that they regard it as the most difficult issue in management (Fourie & Westhuizen, 2008).

Statement of the problem

The demand for higher education, has led to development of various universities offering variety of courses in Kenya. The move has tremendously led to advancement of education in the country. The growth of universities in the country has led to rapid growth in the number of student enrolment. Most of the private universities are well-equipped with resources that facilitate learning but due to low enrollment rate, the facilities are underutilized. Little is known why the population is low despite of many resources at their disposal. With the growing need to increase higher education provision in Kenya, it has become increasingly impossible for the public universities in Kenya to cater for all those who qualify for university admission. This has presented a gap that private universities have not fully utilized their potentials. Few studies have been carried out to investigate the role of strategic communication on the growth of student's population with majority of these studies being undertaken in Western Countries. Most of the studies have concentrated on other aspects not related to strategic decision making. This presented a research gap that the study sought to fill by investigating the influence of strategic decision making on growth of student population in selected private universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical review

Resource-based theory

The theory was advanced by Barney in (1991). This study was guided by the resource-based view. The resource-based view (RBV), suggests that competitiveness can be achieved by innovatively delivering superior value to customers. The existing literature focuses on the strategic decision making on identification and use of resources by a firm for developing a sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991).

The resource-based view explained the success and failures of firms across boundaries by considering the competitiveness of their subsidiaries or local alliances in emerging market. Local knowledge provided by a subsidiary or local alliance becomes an important resource for conceptualizing value as per the local requirements. According to Resource Based Theory resources are inputs into a firm's production process; can be classified into three categories as: physical capital, human capital and organizational capital. A capability is a capacity for a set of resources to perform a stretch task of an activity. Each organization is a collection of unique resources and capabilities that provides the basis for its strategy and the primary source of its returns (Barney, 1991).

According to the research, in the 21st-century hyper-competitive landscape, a firm is a collection of evolving capabilities that is managed dynamically in pursuit of above-average returns. Thus, differences in firm's performances across time are driven primarily by their unique resources and capabilities rather than by an industry's structural characteristics. The Resource based view theory is used to explain how private Universities gain competitiveness through innovatively delivering superior value to customers, they focus on the strategic identification and use of resources for developing a sustained competitive advantage. In order to achieve this, private universities need to position themselves strategically through proper goal setting, strategic communication, stakeholder participation and strategy implementation (Barney, 1991). The RBV theory has been criticized having no managerial implications. According to Priem & Butler (2001), the resource-based view fails to address managerial implications or operational validity. The resource-based view explains that managers have to develop and obtain strategic resources that meet the criteria valuable, rareness, non-imitable and non-substitutional (VRIN criteria) and how an appropriate organization can be developed. However, the resource-based view does not explain how managers can do this (Connor, 2002).

Communication and growth of students' population

Successful organizations are characterized by good communication rather than quality of the strategic plan or vision. This attribute is enhanced by ability of the top leadership to communicate the vision and strategic objectives to those who execute the strategy. Strategic communication is the process of establishing a common message about the plan. It entails the provision of recurrent communication updates, organized regular meetings to monitor the progress of the strategic plan, and determining existing barriers to strategy execution arising from communication gaps (Mantere, 2013).

The university leadership use a variety of communication tools including visuals and graphics, leader-to-group communications, and manager to staff one-on-one communications all of which correlate with strategic effectiveness or performance. The more stakeholders

understand the plan, the more likely it will be to create an engaged and feedback-friendly workforce (Dinwoodie, Quinn, & McGuire, 2014). Recognizing and communicating a clearly articulated strategic intent is one of the most essential roles a business leader can accomplish. Consequently, communication ensures that employees are on the same page, which improves the sharing and understanding of the vision, mission and strategic objectives of the company.

A study by Fourie and Westhuizen (2008) explored the value and use of concept maps in the alignment process of the strategic intent. The study used a computer-based concept-mapping tool amongst the top-level management of a wine industry based in South Africa. Concept mapping was described as a method that creates a visual representation and illustrates the thoughts, ideas, or planned actions that arise from a group of stakeholders on a particular interest, the findings indicated the existence of strategy execution problems at all the hierarchical levels considered in the study. These problems were mostly attributed to absence of a visionary leadership and inadequacy in communication of the strategic intent. The study implies that execution of strategic goals requires that input from all the stakeholders.

Similarly, Argenti (2008) have asserted that communication is at the center of everything and that an institution will not execute strategy if it cannot communicate it. They further emphasize that as an organization grows in size, it is usually affected by complexity of market competitiveness and hence there is need for a consistent communications strategy and plan. Foreman, and Argenti, (2008) alluded to the fact that best practices in corporate communication provide links between the corporate communication function, on the one hand, and strategy execution on the other hand. They concluded that clarity in strategic communication was associated with institutional performance.

The paradox in strategic communication lies in the fact that although it is ordinary and apparently easy to communicate, it is difficult to communicate effectively to make certain that meaning is shared and the messages are not misunderstood. For vast majority of institutions, however, having well-defined vision and mission statements does not affect performance but rather the short of a clearly communicated intent and the complex and abstract nature of business strategy makes strategies complicated to communicate to employees (Rensburg, 2011).

Hallahan (2007) argues that if a firm wants to remain vibrant and successful in the long run, it must make impact assessment of the external environment, especially such relevant groups as prospective students, other universities, the institutions, career advisers, parents and the employers. Effective strategy may enable a business to influence the environment in its favor and even defend itself against competition. Muturi (2008) adds that given the current focus in business, there is need to understand competitor strengths in the market and then position

one's own offerings to take advantage of weaknesses and avoid head on clashes against strengths. He says that to adapt to environmental changes, firms require effective leadership.

Universities compete for students, research support, faculty members and financial support. However, the main competition is for students who define the growth and sustainability of the university. This competition is becoming increasingly aggressive and global. De Boer, Enders, & Jongbloed (2009) note that as the number of universities grows, the competition increases and more competition lead to efficiency, higher quality, more innovation, more differentiation and more choices for consumers. Porter (2008) describes the threat of new entrants as directly related to barrier to entry for that particular industry. He argues that it is not necessarily the actual entry of new competitors but the threat of new entrant to the industry that drives competition. As more and more students attain university credentials, there is increasing demand for the same because these credentials become the base expectation in the market place. This expectation leads to more competition for the same number of available spots and students are willing to pay more to capture a seat that is considered more prestigious to differentiate themselves more favorably from other with similar credentials. This suggests a clear advantage to the better-established institutions. Newcomer universities are unlikely to have earned a sufficient reputation and respect from the industry to guarantee jobs therefore the demand side benefit is not realized. In the case of universities, the buyer is the student. Duczmal (2006) argues that the power of students increases with the number of options they have to choose from. With more and more universities offering degrees, students will have more choices and the competition for buyers will grow. This can, therefore, limit the ability of universities to increase tuition fee.

In the higher education industry, the intensity of rivalry depends on the object of the competition which can be competition for students, staff members, and government funding and research grants. The rivalry can be defined further by examining structural factors, the profile of exiting players and the industry context. Kimando, Njogu, and Sakwa (2012) assert that there has been a rapid growth of private universities over the last five years, which has been fuelled by several factors including limited opportunities available in public universities and the desire to complement public universities. The competition has made public universities to join the fray by opening new colleges in different parts of the country and introducing parallel degree programs in response to spiraling demand for higher education and for the purpose of dealing with competition brought about by private universities. Technology aspects include issues related to use of blogs to market the institution. Even at a young age, students know how advertising works. They recognize that the person working at a university that sings its praises is being paid

to do so (even though they might mean what they're saying). The word of a university marketer, in whatever form it takes, won't matter as much to them as the word of someone like them.

That's where student bloggers come in. Not only are they much closer to prospective students than anyone in marketing office demographically speaking, but they're also perfectly equipped to tell potential students exactly what they need to hear most: what it's like to be a student at your school. In addition to the quality of education and resources the school offers, students want to be able to picture what their life will look like for the next few years. If you recruit a diverse array of student bloggers, their posts can show prospective students a lot of options for what that could be (Kristen, 2016).

Bloggers through their posts can influence decision making with regards to university admissions. The growth of students' population in the digital era can be realized if the institutions can engage professional bloggers to enhance their online presence and address some of the salient issues that may not be communicated directly to the administration. Prospective students also have contextual needs and priorities and they expect quick responses to their questions (Dawson, Murray, Parvis, & Paterson, 2015).

It's important to create communication plans that reach target groups of students with relevant and timely messaging, depending on specific needs and challenges. For this reason, it can be helpful to employ the use of bloggers in order to promote the university image and subsequently grow the student population (Blackstone & Wilkinson, 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey design guided the study. The design is important as it allowed the researcher to provide deep insight into a specific subject and focuses on explaining the aspects of the study in a detailed manner. The location of the study was North Rift, South Rift and Nyanza region. The target university in North Rift was University of Eastern Africa (Baraton), South Rift region was Kabarak University and while in Nyanza was the Great Lakes University. The three universities were selected because they are well-equipped and had capacity to accommodate more students than current status. The unit of observations was staff and student leaders in the institutions of higher learning. A sample size of 10% of the target population is viewed as adequate (Kerlinger, 1986). Three private universities were selected out of 34 representing 105 of the total registered private universities in Kenya. However, owing to the small number of student leaders, the researcher used 100% to determine sample size. In this regard, the overall sample size for the study was 110 respondents, 68 university staff and 42 student leaders. The sample was distributed in the table below.

Table 1: Target Population

University	Staff						Student leaders		Sample size		
	Admin	Education	Business	ICT	Total	Percent	Student leaders	Percent	Student Sample size	Grand total	
Kabarak University	4	25	30	12	71	50	35	20	100	20	55
University of Eastern Africa (Baraton)	4	10	12	8	34	50	17	12	100	12	29
Great Lakes University	4	10	10	8	32	50	16	10	100	10	26
Total	12	45	52	28	137		68	42		42	110

Source: Selected private universities in Kenya Administration (2019)

The study was a descriptive survey, hence the basis of the choice of questionnaires as data collection instrument. The questions in the questionnaire were structured to assist the cater for objectives of the study. The questions therein were on a five-point Likert scale. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the respondents using drop and pick method. The respondents were given enough time to respond to the questionnaire. Once the raw data had been collected the questionnaires were checked for accuracy which was important as it led to credibility to all subsequent analysis and findings. All the items were then classified before entering into statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 23.0). Descriptive statistics such as frequency were used to analyze qualitative data and inferential statistics such as ANOVA and multiple regression were used to analyze data quantitatively.

RESULTS

Influence of strategic communication on the growth of students' population

The respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement on the various indicators of strategic communication and the results were as presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Decision made by the institution is communicated

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	39	39.8	39.8
Strongly agree	38	38.8	38.8
Moderately agree	7	7.1	7.1
Disagree	8	8.2	8.2
Strongly disagree	6	6.1	6.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

As indicated in table 2, the findings of the study indicated that 39.8 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that decision made by the institution is communicated, 38.8 percent strongly agree, 7.1 percent moderately agree, 8.2 percent disagree and 6.1 percent strongly disagree. The implication of the findings is that the selected private universities relay information to the stakeholders affected by the decision in the university. The findings are supported with that of Ross (2011) who found out that the leadership in most of the private universities made quality decisions that were adopted in a timely manner. Most of the strategic decision was made by the senior level managers of the universities. Strategic planning involved the senior top management officials and thus strategic communication of the decision made by the university was crucial.

Table 2: Public awareness on government sponsorship in private universities is effectively done

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	45	45.9	45.9
Strongly agree	25	25.5	25.5
Moderately agree	13	13.3	13.3
Disagree	4	4.1	4.1
Strongly disagree	11	11.2	11.2
Total	98	100.0	100.0

Table 3 shows that 45.9 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that public awareness on government sponsorship in private universities is effectively done, 25.5 percent strongly agree, 13.3 percent moderately agree, 4.1 percent disagree and 11.2 percent strongly disagree. The findings imply that government through various platforms such as radio, television; websites and social media have raised the awareness to the public on its sponsorship of qualified

students in private universities. This is done normally through the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS).

Table 3: Information regarding the institution can be easily accessed

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	41	41.8	41.8
Strongly agree	34	34.7	34.7
Moderately agree	8	8.2	8.2
Disagree	8	8.2	8.2
Strongly disagree	7	7.1	7.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

The findings in table 4 indicates that 41.8 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that information regarding the institution can be easily accessed, 34.7 percent strongly agree, 8.2 percent moderately agree, 8.2 percent disagree and 7.1 percent strongly disagree. The implication of the findings is that the private universities availed the information to the general public and potential students. This may be attributed to the adoption of new technology where majority of the universities utilizes websites for dissemination of information. The findings are supported by Youssef (2008) who found out that in the last two decades high education institutions have invested heavily in ICT which has had a major impact in the university context in terms of university access to information with regards to admission and available academic programmes.

Table 4: Information on the university website is updated frequently

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	23	23.5	23.5
Strongly agree	47	48.0	48.0
Moderately agree	13	13.3	13.3
Disagree	10	10.2	10.2
Strongly disagree	5	5.1	5.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

The findings in table 5 showed that 48 percent of the respondents strongly agree that information on the university website was updated frequently, 23.5 percent very strongly agree, 13.3 percent moderately agree, 10.2 percent disagree while 5.1 percent strongly disagree. The

findings are in line with Ocholla (2015) who posit there was evidence that efforts were made to enable student's process admission requests and obtain admission letters online, book hostel rooms using Moi University Hostel Management System, access e-resources for study and research, and access examination results.

Table 5: Professional bloggers are used to publicize the institution

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	10	10.2	10.2
Strongly agree	39	5.1	5.1
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	5	39.8	39.8
Strongly disagree	38	38.8	38.8
Total	98	100.0	100.0

The results in table 6 shows that 39.8 percent of the respondents disagree that professional bloggers are used to publicize the institution, 38.8 percent strongly disagree, 6.1 moderately agree, 5.1 percent strongly agree and 10.2 percent very strongly agree. The findings contrast with that of Dawson, Murray, Parvis and Paterson (2015) who found out that bloggers through their posts can influence decision making with regards to university admissions. The growth of students' population in the digital era can be realized if the institutions can engage professional bloggers to enhance their online presence and address some of the salient issues that may not be communicated directly to the administration. The disagreement observed from majority of the respondents may be attributed to the inaccessibility of outstanding bloggers as compared to other information sites such as websites. It was also noted that some bloggers have been associated with negativity hence some institutions tend to shy away from them.

Table 6: Bloggers plays important role in facilitating communication between university and other stakeholders

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	57	58.2	58.2
Strongly agree	20	20.4	20.4
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	10	10.2	10.2
Strongly disagree	5	5.1	5.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

The findings indicated that 58.2 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that bloggers play important role in facilitating communication between university and other stakeholders, 20.4 percent strongly agree, 6.1 percent moderately agree, 10.2 percent disagree and 5.1 percent strongly disagree. This agrees with the findings of Dawson, Murray, Parvis and Paterson (2015) who found out that bloggers plays crucial role in information dissemination in an organization.

Table 7: The institution has fully utilized the readily available medium of communication to sensitize the public

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	34	34.7	34.7
Strongly agree	43	43.9	43.9
Moderately agree	3	3.1	3.1
Disagree	11	11.2	11.2
Strongly disagree	7	7.1	7.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

Table 8 indicated that 43.9 percent strongly agree that the institution has fully utilized the readily available medium of communication to sensitize the public on available programs, 34.7 percent very strongly agree, 3.1 percent moderately agree, 11.2 disagree and 7.1 percent strongly disagreed. Universities use advertising to market activities like admissions or intakes by buying airtime in radio or television and buying a page or more in the daily newspapers. For example, during graduation ceremonies, most universities in Kenya buy airtime on local television to air the ceremony. This airtime helps the universities increase brand knowledge within the audience watching.

Table 8: Adoption of ICT have aided communication between students and the university

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	29	29.6	29.6
Strongly agree	48	49.0	49.0
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	11	11.2	11.2
Strongly disagree	4	4.1	4.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

The findings in table 9 revealed that 49.0 percent of the respondents strongly agree adoption of ICT have aided communication between students and the university, 29.6 percent very strongly agree, 6.1 percent moderately agree, 11.2 disagree and 4.1 percent strongly disagree. The results imply that private universities have utilized the advances in technology to enhance growth of students' population. The findings are supported by (Petley, 2003) who argued that advertising is a favourable promotion of goods and services to the public with the intention to draw the attention of people and increase the amount of sales for these goods and services. Advertising serves as a tool for competition, companies use creative and appealing advertisements to patronize their brands against their competition and universities have not been left behind. Adverts can be done through print and broadcast media. Technological advancements have pushed institutions to do vital marketing through social networking sites like My Space, Twitter and Facebook.

Table 9: Strategic communication influence growth of students' population

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	43	43.9	43.9
Strongly agree	34	34.7	34.7
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	6	6.1	6.1
Strongly disagree	9	9.2	9.2
Total	98	100.0	100.0

The findings revealed that 43.9 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that strategic communication influence growth of students' population, 34.7 percent strongly agree, 6.1 percent moderately agree and disagree respectively while 9.2 percent strongly disagree. The findings conclude that strategic communication aid in growth of population among private universities.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Table indicates the summary results for the analysis of variance (ANOVA). The model for the study gave ANOVA regression sum squares of 147.648 and residual sum square of 6.311. The results indicated that the overall model was statistically significant. The results further imply that the independent variables are good predictors of the dependent variable which was supported by an *F*-statistics value of 543.934 with a *p*- value of 0.004 which was less than the conventional probability of 0.05 significance level.

Table 11: Analysis of Variance

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Strategic communication	Regression	147.648	4	36.912	543.934	.004
	Residual	6.311	93	.068		

The findings of the study indicated that 39.8 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that decision made by the institution is communicated. 45.9 percent of the respondents strongly agree that public awareness on government sponsorship in private universities is effectively done. 41.8 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that information regarding the institution can be easily accessed. It was also revealed that 48.0 of the respondents agree that information on the university website is regularly updated which may help them inform the potential students of the latest developments in the university such as available intakes and additional programme for choice. The results also indicated that 39.8 percent of the respondents disagree that professional bloggers are used to publicize the institution. However, the findings found out that 58.2 percent of the respondents strongly agree that professional bloggers plays important role in facilitating communication between university and other stakeholders. The findings indicated that 43.9 percent of the respondents agree that the institution have fully utilized the readily available medium of communication to sensitize the public on available programs. Furthermore, the finding shows that 49.0 percent of the respondents agree adoption of ICT have aided communication between students and the university. Finally, the findings show that 43.9 strongly agree that strategic communication influence growth of students 'population. The findings support the argument by Kotler (2003) that educational institutions need effective communications with their markets and publics. Educators usually use catalogues and bulletins describing their institution and its programs. Private universities communicate about themselves by their very existence, whether or not they have a formal communications program. Private universities use controllable marketing tools that an institution uses to produce the response it wants from its various target markets. It consists of everything that the university can do to influence the demand for the services that it offers. The implication of the findings is that private universities need to device best method of reaching the intended audiences with the right message. Some of the available media to utilize by most private universities includes television, radio, websites and social media.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicated that 39.8 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that decision made by the institution is communicated. 45.9 percent of the respondents strongly agree that public awareness on government sponsorship in private universities is effectively done. 41.8 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that information regarding the institution can be easily accessed. It was also revealed that 48.0 of the respondents agree that information on the university website is regularly updated which may help them inform the potential students of the latest developments in the university such as available intakes and additional programme for choice. The results also indicated that 39.8 percent of the respondents disagree that professional bloggers are used to publicize the institution. However, the findings found out that 58.2 percent of the respondents strongly agree that professional bloggers plays important role in facilitating communication between university and other stakeholders. The findings indicated that 43.9 percent of the respondents agree that the institution have fully utilized the readily available medium of communication to sensitize the public on available programs. Furthermore, the finding shows that 49.0 percent of the respondents agree adoption of ICT have aided communication between students and the university. Finally, the findings show that 43.9 strongly agree that strategic communication influence growth of students' population. The findings support the argument by Kotler (2003) that educational institutions need effective communications with their markets and publics. Educators usually use catalogues and bulletins describing their institution and its programs. Private universities communicate about themselves by their very existence, whether or not they have a formal communications program. Private universities use controllable marketing tools that an institution uses to produce the response it wants from its various target markets. It consists of everything that the university can do to influence the demand for the services that it offers. The implication of the findings is that private universities need to device best method of reaching the intended audiences with the right message. Some of the available media to utilize by most private universities includes television, radio, websites and social media.

It is recommended that private universities should consider using professional bloggers to build the publicity of the institution. It is further recommended that the universities should use media of communication that has a wider coverage in order to reach potential students.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER STUDIES

The study targeted university staff and student leaders only. The scope of the study was strategic communication, stakeholders' participation and strategy implementation. Further studies should be carried out on other variables not covered by the present study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am sincerely grateful to various people who contributed enormously to the production of this treasured research document either through financial, moral, spiritual or social support. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions and inspiration of my supervisors, Dr. Richard Kimetto and Dr. Joseph K. Bengat. I extend my sincere appreciation to all my faculty members for their relentless encouragement and teamwork towards the attainment of this goal. Finally, I want to acknowledge the management of the selected private universities in Kenya for giving me an opportunity to advance my career through research, providing access to academic resources and also creating an enabling environment for the realization of the same.

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